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**FOLLOWING THESE TIPS CAN MAKE YOUR CHRISTMAS
A LESS-STRESSFUL, MORE-SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCE**

DAYTON, Ohio — For many, the Christmas season creates overwhelming anxiety and dread over its cost, commercialism and seemingly unending obligations. But it doesn't have to be that way, says a campus minister at University of Dayton who conducts an annual workshop on planning a less-stressful holiday.

The first step in reducing stress, advises Sister Mary Louise Foley, F.M.I., is to locate it. "Look at the way in which you deal with gifts, money, spare time, health and the way you celebrate the religious aspects of Christmas. If you aren't happy with them, find ways to make them more appealing."

These tips have helped Foley's workshop participants create a less-anxious Christmas:

- Gestures for gifts — Buy fewer ties and socks and reach out to the community. "Take the family to a nursing home to visit a lonely resident or to a soup kitchen and feed the hungry," Foley suggests. "Have your children give up some of their gifts to other less-fortunate peers."
- Delegate duties — Make a "to-do" list and involve the whole family. "Have everyone sign the cards or shop. What doesn't get done on the list, doesn't get done," Foley says. "Christmas is no time for guilt."
- Realistic expectations — If there has been a recent divorce or a death in your family, accept that Christmas this year isn't going to be the same. "Start new traditions to help deal with the pain of a loss," says Foley.
- Cut back on the cookies and egg nog — Sleep, diet and exercise patterns are disrupted for many people during the Christmas season, Foley says, but they shouldn't be neglected. Common sense will go far toward reducing the malaise associated with overindulgence.
- Examine the essence of the season — Those who celebrate the spiritual aspect of Christmas find more fulfillment in the holiday, Foley believes. "Ask yourself, 'Am I celebrating Consumer U.S.A. or am I celebrating the birth of baby Jesus?'" Make time to drive around the neighborhood to see the holiday lights or visit a live nativity scene put on by a local church. Foley also suggests family talks on the significance of Christmas, including seasonal Bible readings, as a way of regaining religious perspective.
- Look inward — "Christmas is a time of joy and giving," Foley says. "Find ways to put these principles in your life to give to others throughout the year, just as Jesus did."

"You can create the kind of Christmas you want," Foley says. "But it takes effort."

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